

[Otto Kerl]

Mr. Kerl

Cross Plains

Blacksmith Story

Nettie Smith

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Mr. Otto Kerl, father of the interviewed came from Germany in 1846. He settled on a farm about two miles from Cross Plains. There was no village there at that time. There were a few scattered homes. The Simpsons, Heindy and Haney families were among the earliest settlers in and near Cross Plains. The Haney farm is now known as the Mel Pick farm. It is located south west of the [present?] village and the original stone house still stands . Truly an old landmark in that vicinity. It is believed this house was constructed in 1832 and is probably the oldest house in the state in use at the present time. It is the oldest house in Dane county. 1

Cross Plains was named so on account because of two distinct strips of unwooded territory that crossed in that locality. Some difference in opinion is given. Mr. Kerl says the earliest settlers gave that as the reason while others say that the two main Indian trails crossed just east of the village. The one from Prairie du Chien to Green Bay and the other from Galena to Ft. Winnebago Portage.

Otto Kerl lived near Cross Plains before the post office was established there. A farmer at Pine Bluff named George P. Thompson was the post master in that locality. Approximately once a week Mr. Kerl went to call for his mail. One morning he found Mr. Thompson

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working in the fields. When he inquired if there were letters for him Mr. Thompson took off his tall "stovepipe" hat in which he carried the mail. He sorted out the letters and found the ones for Mr. Kerl. This unique post office and mail carrier, served the early pioneers until the post office was established at the village of Cross Plains. The first of the three villages plotted, and now united was in the north eastern part of the village where the Catholic church is located. There was a general store, operated by John and William Baer, in which the post office was conducted by one of the Baer brothers.

Early days in Cross Plains were noted for there celebrations and "lively times." There were many soldiers from Cross Plains who served in the Civil War and after their return picnics fallys and patriotic meetings were held. There wer e also church festivals and socials. 3

Christiana was the name of the second village and was plotted west and slightly south of Cross Plains. The first depot was located near the mill pond where the road crosses the creek.

Later a man named Abija Fox who lived approximately a mile west of Christiana offered the railroad company a site for a new depot. Another village was plotted and was called Foxville. These three villages combined to form one. The two business sections are joined by one long street of residences. There is quite a long distance between the depot tat Foxville and the post office at Christiana, now all know as Cross Plains. The mill, in operation at the present time, is very old structure. 4

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The early settlers saw many Indians in their journeyings. Mr. Kerl said their visit were periodical. When they heard the wolves howl they knew the Indians were near. Wolves usually trailed Indians for deer meat.

Mr. Kerl was born in 1859 and recalls many interesting incidents that occurred in the vicinity of Cross Plains in pioneer days.

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His father, Otto Kerl, with a friend whose name was Conrad [?] Scheele, walked from Milwaukee in 1846 to take up land in the country near which is now Cross Plains. They then walked to Mineral Point to file their claims at the Federal land office there.

Then they walked back to Milwaukee to purchase axes, tools and necessary articles with which to build a log cabin.

Later Mr. Kerl made two trips to Milwaukee on foot to purchase provisions. He walked to Madison many times.

There was a small English settlement near Marxville called Half-way Prairie. A Mr. Haney operated a stage coach line Cross Plains to Sauk City via half-way Prairie.

The old Government trail was west of the present highway more through the middle of the valley. Mr. Kerl said the early settlers endured hardships as "they were better able to 'take it' for they had not, been spoiled by good times."